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ABSTRACT

Stress is a major sphere of influence on students that acts as the "invisible curriculum," and affects their reaction and adjustment to the whole college experience. There is a need to obtain systematic data about college students' experience of tedium, a particular form of stress, defined as the experience of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion created by daily grinding, steady, continuous pressures and unending struggles to achieve unattainable goals. In order to compare students and professionals in terms of their tedium and to investigate various life and work features as tedium correlates, 84 undergraduates and 205 professionals completed a 21-item questionnaire. College students were found to experience more tedium than professionals. They also perceived their school work as more stressful and lacking in rewards relative to the way professionals perceive their work experience. (Author/HLM)

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Tedium in College

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There are more than 10 million young people attending colleges and universities in the United States. College students are a national treasure of incalculable worth, and yet it is a fact that we know almost nothing about them (Bloom, 1975). One of the areas of greatest concern to all those sharing an interest in college students is the stress inherent in college life. Stress is a major sphere of influence on students, that affects their reaction and adjustment to the whole college experience as the "invisible curriculum" (Snyder, 1966). There are numerous dramatic indicators documenting that college years are a period of tremendous stress, especially the phenomena of students' suicides (Sneiden, 1966, 1969, 1971), college dropout (e.g., Summerskill, 1962; Timmons, 1975) and emotional breakdown of students (Cavskadon, 1975; Estes, 1973).

The present study attempted to go beyond the study of selective groups of students exhibiting unusually high levels of distress, and obtain systematic data about college students' experience of tedium. Tedium is defined as the experience of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion. It is a result of daily grinding, steady and continuous pressures and never-ending struggles to achieve unattainable goals. (Kanner, Kafry and Pines 1978; Kafry and Pines, 1979, 1980; Pines and Aronson with Kafry 1980; Pines and Kafry 1978, 1979, 1980).

Eighty-four University of California, Berkeley undergraduates and 205 professionals participated in the study. The study had two major goals: (1) to compare the students to the professionals in terms of their tedium and (2) to investigate various life and work features as tedium correlates. Tedium was studied by a 21-item questionnaire (corresponding to its physical,

emotional and attitudinal components). Life and work features generated by the tedium model (Kafry & Pines, 1979) were studied by specially designed 7-point scales.

Results. Students had the highest mean value of tedium of all the samples surveyed (see Table 1). In addition 8% of the students and only 2.5% of the professionals experienced the highest levels of tedium. Even though life satisfaction did not differ significantly among the samples, work satisfaction did with students ranking their work satisfaction lower than all the samples with the single exception of unskilled nonprofessionals.

Part of the reason for these disturbing findings can be seen in Table 2 which describes various life and work features of students and professionals as tedium correlates. From these data it is clear that students' perception of their life features is rather similar to that of the professionals but their work features are much more negative: they have less of such positive features as variety, autonomy, significance, innovation, self-expression, influence, appreciation, available "time-out," personal relations and sharing. They had more of such negative features as underload, demand to prove themselves in competitive situations, and guilt. While life outside of school was responsible to many of the positive features, school work was characterized by stress, hassles and pressures. And it should be noted that tedium was more correlated with the absence of positive features than it was correlated with the presence of negative ones.

Discussion. College students, in the prime of their youth, in one of the best and most beautiful campuses in the country were found to experience more tedium than other groups of professionals. Furthermore, they perceived their school work as more stressful and lacking in rewards relative to the way

professionals perceive their work experiences. This seems to result from the high competition in college and the need to prove oneself academically, and even more so from the lack of challenges and feedback characterizing the school environment of large campuses.

Table 1

Means of Tedium and Life/Work Satisfaction

Sample	N	Mean Tedium	Mean Life Satisfaction	Mean Work Satisfaction	Life More Important
Students	84	3.4	5.6	4.7	5.6
Human service professionals	63	3.1	5.9	5.4	5.4
Nonprofessionals	40	3.4	5.5	4.2	6.3
Business	36	3.2	5.7	4.5	4.8
Science	39	3.3	5.7	5.2	5.0
Art	13	3.2	5.7	5.5	4.0
Housewives	14	3.2	5.9	5.4	6.0
		F=2.12 p= .05	F= .88 n.s.	F=5.58 p= .001	F=8.00 p= .001

Table 2

Life and Work Features of Students and Professionals as Tedium Correlates

Variable		Students N-84		Professionals N=205	
		Mean	r/Tedium	Mean	r/Tedium
1. Variety	L	5.3	-.44**	5.2	-.23**
	W	4.2	-.35*	5.0	-.21*
2. Autonomy	L	5.4	-.39**	5.7	-.15*
	W	4.1	-.23*	5.0	-.28**
3. Significance	L	5.3	-.33*	5.2	-.22*
	W	4.1	-.22	5.3	-.21*
4. Success	L	5.2	-.58**	5.2	-.48**
	W	5.1	-.50**	5.2	-.24**
5. Feedback	L	5.2	-.45**	4.9	-.23**
	W	4.7	-.21	4.7	-.15*
6. Innovation	L	4.9	-.20	4.7	-.15*
	W	3.8	-.23*	4.7	-.17*
7. Self-expression	L	5.8	-.39**	5.6	-.31**
	W	4.1	-.10	4.9	-.22*
8. Underload	L	3.3	.49**	3.2	.29**
	W	3.9	.24*	3.3	.15*
9. Overload	L	4.3	.33*	3.8	.13
	W	4.2	.29*	4.0	.13
10. Prove self	L	4.7	.33*	3.6	.10
	W	5.0	.11	4.2	-.00
11. Self-actual	L	5.8	-.26*	5.5	-.27**
	W	4.5	-.10	4.7	-.22**
12. Decision making	L	4.1	.47**	3.4	.21*
	W	4.1	.13	3.9	.18*
13. Environmental pressure	L	2.9	.27*	2.5	.26**
	W	2.9	.22	2.8	.27**
14. Bureaucracy	L	3.4	.17	3.0	.20*
	W	4.4	.17	4.2	.11
15. Administration	L	3.0	.16	2.8	.20*
	W	4.2	.19	4.5	.05
16. Influence	L	5.0	-.08	5.2	-.24**
	W	3.3	-.16	4.0	-.15*

*$p \leq .05$.
**$p \leq .001$.

Table 2 (continued)

Variable		Students		Professionals	
		Mean	r/Tedium	Mean	r/Tedium
17. Rewards	L	4.9	-.30*	5.0	-.41**
	W	4.3	-.09	4.4	-.33**
18. Appreciation	L	5.0	-.50**	5.0	-.32**
	W	4.3	-.32*	4.6	-.32**
19. Guilt	L	3.7	.60**	3.2	.51**
	W	3.6	.32*	3.1	.29**
20. Time out	L	4.1	-.35*	4.4	-.17*
	W	3.6	-.12	4.2	-.11
21. Personal Rel.	L	5.7	-.55**	5.7	-.32**
	W	4.9	-.40**	5.5	-.27**
22. Support	L	5.3	-.31*	5.0	-.29**
	W	4.2	-.32*	4.5	-.27**
23. Overextended emotionally	L	4.6	.04	4.4	.28**
	W	3.7	-.18	4.2	.16*
24. Sharing	L	4.6	-.14	4.7	-.28**
	W	3.5	-.23	4.4	-.13
25. Overextended commitment	L	4.5	.23*	4.1	.22**
	W	4.4	.27*	4.2	.23**
26. Conflicting demands	L	4.5	.21	3.8	.38**
	W	4.0	.15	3.9	.27**
27. Emotional reciprocity	L	5.1	-.57**	5.2	-.29**
	W	3.9	-.32*	4.5	-.18*
28. Comfortable	L	5.2	-.41**	5.6	-.35**
	W	4.6	-.12	4.6	-.29**
29. Important		5.6	.08	5.3	.03
30. Conflict		4.6	.32*	4.2	.36**

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